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ABSTRACT

The major hypothesis tested in this investigation was that college students using audiovisual aids and current reading materials would achieve greater competency in composition than would students taught by conventional methods. The "STEP Writing Test," the "STEP Reading Test," and writing samples were used for evaluation. Also tested were the effects of an experienced teacher, as opposed to an inexperienced one, on the students' writing improvement. Two classes of students who had failed composition acted as the experimental groups, and a class of freshmen who had not previously taken a college composition course served as the control group. Experimental materials used were overhead projector transparencies on the structure of the paragraph, a picture-essay book, short films, newspapers, magazines, and paperbacks. Results showed that students taught with experimental materials (1) improved their writing, (2) enthusiastically changed their attitides toward English, (3) did not improve in reading skills, and (4) gained almost as much from an inexperienced teacher as from an experienced one. (Author/LH)

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Use of Paperbacks and Visual Aids in Teaching Composition to College Freshmen

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Livingston, Alabama

October, 1969

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SUMMARY

The Use of Paperbacks and Visual Aids in Teaching Composition to College Freshmen

This investigation sought to answer this question: How can instruction in composition be improved for students who are inadequately prepared?

The major hypothesis to be tested was that college students who had failed a course in written composition would achieve greater competence by the use of audio-visual aids and current reading materials than students taught by conventional procedures.

To be tested were the following particular components of this hypothesis:

1. Students who use experimental materials will show more gain on a STEP Writing Test than will a control group.
2. Students who use experimental materials will show more gain on a STEP Reading Test than will a control group.
3. Students who use experimental materials will show as much improvement in writing when taught by an inexperienced teacher as when taught by an experienced teacher.
4. Students who use experimental materials will show more improvement in writing, as evaluated by a panel of judges, than will a control group.
5. Students who use the experimental materials will improve in attitude toward English more than will students using conventional materials.

To test these hypotheses, two classes (A and B) of students who had failed composition were scheduled at the same hour. Class A was taught by an experienced teacher; Class B was taught by an inexperienced teacher, who also taught another class of freshmen who had never taken a course in college composition (Class C). Four kinds of materials were used: (1) overhead projector transparencies on the structure of the paragraph, (2) a picture-essay book, (3) short films, and (4) current reading materials.

Results from the use of experimental materials were that improvement of writing was demonstrated by the rating of teachers and by the scores on standardized tests, that experimental materials brought an enthusiastic change in student attitude, that reading skill was not improved, and that an inexperienced teacher had almost equal success with an experienced teacher.

Of these findings the highlight was the enthusiasm of students toward the experimental approach.

The results justify continued research, particularly among students who have had similar experiences with composition (between groups, for example, who have passed previous courses). Other universities that have liberal admission policies should find this study provocative or, perhaps, helpful.

I. Background for the Study

Livingston University has unique problems. These arise from its being located in the Black Belt; from its being a rapidly emerging institution, accorded university status in April, 1968; from its having received a reduced state appropriation during the past two years; and from its believing that a high school graduate should have a chance to earn a college degree.

The Black Belt poses certain economic, social, and cultural problems. A study by the University of Tennessee in 1967-1968 revealed certain characteristics of this area. Most students of Livingston University come from 16 surrounding counties. From these, 109,000 white and 53,000 black high school students graduate annually. Black population in these counties, however, is probably greater than white: Sumter County, in which the university is located, has a ratio of 4 blacks to 1 white. Retail sales average one-half of the national average. Unemployment is the second highest in the nation. While the United States average for unemployment is 3-4%, this area's is 7%, despite black migration in large numbers to urban areas. Although agriculture is the dominant occupation, agricultural jobs have declined as landowners have changed from growing cotton to raising beef. Non-agricultural jobs have increased slightly; in the area served by the university, however, only 36 jobs were offered by new industries. In established industries, 600 new jobs opened. Bank deposits are up only slightly. Average family income is $3,000-$3,600, but the parents of a typical Livingston University student earn $6,000-$10,000. This fact indicates that the poor child does not (cannot?) come to college. Men students outnumber women 3 to 1. The typical student is a white, single male 18-20 years old. (A Comprehensive Study of Livingston University, II, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1968). In the fall of 1968 only 6 black undergraduates were enrolled. This number has risen in the fall of 1969, and university officials expect it to rise much more. Because of their cultural and educational background, black students offer an additional educational challenge to the university.

The last two problems need only to be sketched here. Becoming a university has called for additional faculty and staff, library funds, equipment, etc.--and all this while the student population has grown 39.7% during the past year but while state appropriations have been reduced 10 %. The last problem faced by the university is philosophical: how to offer the best instruction to students whose entrance scores on the American College Testing Program do not indicate success. The university, during the summer quarter, permits a high school graduate to enter, regardless of his ACT scores. During the other three quarters he must have a

cumulative score of 14. The department asked itself: How can instruction in composition be improved for students who are inadequately prepared? And it was to this problem that the English Department of the university addressed itself some years ago.

In 1966 the department analyzed its freshmen classes from the previous 3 years. It found that most of the students came from small high schools in which instruction in English is similar and that the instruction followed this pattern: grammar instruction, with workbook activities, was repeated for 6 or 7 months annually; literature instruction was given for 2 or 3 months; and an average of 1.2 themes (some never returned to the student) were assigned each year.

In 1967 the department, with the help of a faculty member from Montevallo (Alabama) University and one from the University of Alabama, studied the department, the course in composition, and the freshmen students. A summary of the findings is given below.

In their attitudes toward written composition and toward grades, the 11 faculty members of the English Department are fairly uniform. All are experienced teachers. Three have the doctor's degree, and five are completing requirements. Although teachers vary widely in assigning grades, the department believes that its grades are fairly consistent; about three-fourths of the faculty have taught high-school students; the tenure is long, averaging 10 years overall; and frequent staff meetings are concerned with grading. All teachers believe the course vital to the needs of all students.

The course in written English at Livingston University is conventionally planned. Unless excused by the chairman of the English Department, all students are required to complete two quarters of composition for a total of 10 credit hours. Instruction is based on the textbook Writing With a Purpose (James M. McCrimmon, Houghton Mifflin & Company) and on a set of transparencies for the overhead projector, Contemporary Composition (Science Research Associates), planned for the twelfth and thirteenth grades. Twelve themes, all of which receive grades, are assigned for each course. Likewise, 2 or more conferences with the instructor are mandatory. Two novels, ranging from Dickens to Salinger, are used as the basis for two critical themes.

Those students whose ACT scores are 16 or above are placed in the credit courses. Of these students, about 10 per cent

fail the first course, and about 5 per cent fail the second (and final) course. About 70 per cent of these students later graduate.

Adding to the total of student failures in the credit courses, however, are those students whose ACT scores are below 16 and who have taken a required course in remedial English. Their lack of success in the credit courses sometimes runs the failures as high as 50 per cent, depending on the course and the quarter. In any spring quarter, for example, about 85 per cent of the students in the first course have ACT scores lower than 16, have taken the remedial course, and have failed the first course one or more times. About 10 per cent are students whose ACT scores are 16 or above but who have already failed the course at least once. And about 5 per cent are students whose ACT scores are 16 or above, but who are entering the university for the first time.

In its study the department discovered that much research has been done on the teaching of composition to high school students, but little time has been expended on successful ways to teach the poorly prepared college student, the student who fails to learn to write satisfactorily in the conventionally taught course.

Marshall McLuhan may have pointed toward an answer when he wrote:

> Many of our institutions suppress all the natural direct experience of youth, who respond with untaught delight to the poetry and the beauty of the new technological environment, the environment of popular culture. It could be their door to all past achievement if studied as an active (and not necessarily benigh) force.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> It is a matter of the greatest urgency that our educational institutions realize that we now have civil war among these environments created by media other than the printed word. The classroom is now in a vital struggle for survival with the immensely persuasive "outside" world created by new information media.
>
> . . . . . .

> The dropout represents a rejection of nineteenth century technology as manifested in our educational establishments (The Medium is the Massage, Bantam, 1967).

Of "the new technological environment," transparencies for the overhead projector and picture-essay books had been used by some faculty members to teach composition before this project began. The department thought that these two materials could offer help to the weaker student.

Another medium to stimulate student writing was the short film. David A. Sohn, formerly of the National Film Project, Fordham University, wrote in "Film Study and the English Teacher" (Indiana University Audio-Visual Center, 1968):

> Many times students are called upon to write about things solely on the basis of their experience. Relying on abstract recall is difficult for many students.
>
> A relatively untapped area for stimulating writing is the use of the short, non-dialogue film. There are many shorts that tell a story or create a visual poem without any dialogue. The use of such films for composition work adds variety to the written assignments and teaches the student much about how to see more precisely. Such films should be screened first for enjoyment and then at least one more time for careful observing with the assignment in mind.

Particularly significant for this investigation were Edmund J. Farrell's observations: "Because of its visual and auditory clues, the film has a unique ability to communicate to students with varying intellectual capacities, an ability that teachers of English have not always capitalized upon" (English, Education, and the Electronic Revolution, NCTE, Champaign, Illinois, 1967).

Another promising approach was to surround the students with paperbacks, magazines, and newspapers--a practice best reported in two paperback best sellers: Paperbacks in the School, edited by Butman et al (Bantam Books, N.Y., N.Y., 1963), and Hooked on Books, by Daniel Fader (Berkeley Publishing Corporation, N.Y., N.Y., 1968).

These "new media" thus consisted of four kinds of materials:

1. Simple transparencies for the overhead projector.

2. Picture-method textbook to concern the students with their environment and to provide rhetorical principles of writing. This book could be studied simultaneously with the transparencies and films.

3. Short films, mostly non-dialogue, designed to stimulate the students' imagination to write.

4. Newspapers, magazines, and paperbacks.

The department then constructed a course that would use these media. Instruction would follow this pattern: (1) student viewing of audio-visual materials or reading of newspapers, magazines, or books; (2) informal discussion by students of reactions, the teacher acting only as chairman; (3) student writing based upon student reactions; (4) small group response to the compositions; (5) reading of the composition by the instructor but not necessarily assigning a grade; (6) and reading of the best compositions to the group by the instructor.

Unlike the conventional courses in composition, in which no undergraduate students work with other students, a student-teacher, a senior English major, was available for conferences from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. each afternoon; also at the same time a student acting as operator of the film projector and "librarian" showed films or supervised the use of the reading materials.

Would these media prove more successful in teaching composition to the poorly prepared student than the textbook-lecture method?

To answer this question, the department proposed these four media to use in teaching students who had failed the composition course. The course would in general follow this pattern: pre-testing, one week; learning to write, nine weeks; and post-testing, one week.

The major hypothesis to be tested was that college students who had failed a course in written composition would achieve greater competence by the use of audio-visual aids and current reading materials than students taught by conventional procedures.

To be tested were the following particular components of this hypothesis:

1. Students who use experimental materials will show more gain on a STEP Writing Test than will a control group.
2. Students who use experimental materials will show more gain on a STEP Reading Test than will a control group.
3. Students who use the experimental materials will show as much improvement in writing when taught by an inexperienced teacher as when taught by an experienced teacher.
4. Students who use experimental materials will show more improvement in writing, as evaluated by a panel of judges, than will a control group.
5. Students who use the experimental materials will improve in attitude toward English more than will students using conventional materials.

II. Methods

The original investigation called for a study of 75 freshmen. Three classes of 25 students each were scheduled. Two experimental classes, the A and B classes, were taught at the same hour. Only students who had taken freshman composition and had failed it were registered in Classes A and B. In Class C, the control group, only students who had not taken freshman composition in college were registered; these students followed the traditional course in written composition as taught at Livingston University. Class A was taught by an experienced teacher, and Class B by an inexperienced teacher. Class C, meeting at another hour, was taught by the inexperienced instructor of Class B. This arrangement appears as follows:

EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

Class A	Class B
taught by experienced teacher	taught by inexperienced teacher

CONTROL GROUP

Class C
taught by inexperienced teacher of Class B

In February, 1969, at pre-registration, instead of the expected 75 students for these courses, only 59 registered.

After pre-registration, but before classes had begun in March, the investigator attempted to stratify the students in

the two experimental classes of A and B according to age, sex, the scores of the American Council Testing Program, and the number of times they had failed the course "Written English." Because of later internal administrative changes, however, students from both classes were shifted so that precise stratification was impossible.

During the pre-testing period, the students took the Sequential Tests of Educational Progress (STEP), Reading and Writing Tests, Grade 13 (Cooperative Test Division, Educational Testing Service), and A Scale To Measure Attitudes Toward Any School Subject, edited by H. H. Remmers (University Book Store, Purdue University). In addition, they wrote a class theme.

During the instructional period, the first classes were devoted to Groups A and B viewing short, non-dialogue films, such as The Moods of Surfing (Pyramid Films) and A Dream of Wild Horses (McGraw-Hill Films). Students and teacher in a circle then discussed the film, the teacher acting mainly as chairman. The purpose of these meetings was to get the student acquainted with his classmates and his teacher, to get him to express his ideas, and to get him interested in the course. During this week, the student also expressed his attitude or feelings toward the film on paper (with the understanding that he would receive no grade on any written work until after a month's instruction). He then worked within a group, reading and criticizing other papers while other students read and criticized his. The group then selected its best paper and a member from the group to read it to the entire class. Finally, the student turned his paper in to the instructor, who checked those sentences or words that could not be understood quickly and clearly. The instructor strove to find some sentence or some well-chosen phrase to praise. To receive his paper, the student scheduled a conference with either his instructor or the student-teacher, who explained his errors and his "strengths." The student then rewrote those parts the instructor had marked.

During the third and fourth weeks, transparencies for the overhead projector on the structure of the paragraph from Power in Composition by James F. Campbell (Science Research Associates) were presented. Three units--Writing I: "The Topic Sentence," Writing II: "Paragraph Development," and Writing III: "Outlining"--were taught in ten lessons. Though designed for the junior-high school student, the transparencies were visually attractive and challenging enough for the best student. Students, in groups, were then assigned

the task of examining their previous "compositions." From the transparencies they had formulated questions to ask about the paragraph structure: Was there a topic sentence: Did it express an attitude or a mood, or was it a statement of fact? Were there details or illustrations to prove the writer's attitude? Was the closing sentence effective?

Students inevitably found it necessary to rewrite their compositions. A common defect, they admitted, was a lack of details or examples, and to obtain these they needed to view the film again, even if they had to view it out of class.

Films, instead of only the printed page, served as sources for the first experiences in writing. For example, in writing a paragraph developed by the use of details, a student viewed the film Rainshower (Churchill Films). Rich in sensuous particulars, it provided more than enough material to develop a topic sentence. Likewise, in writing a persuasive essay on one's opinion on a controversial subject, a student viewed No Reason to Stay (Britannica Films), which presents an intelligent boy driven by his school and society to become a dropout. The student was asked to consider such questions as these: Was the film one-sided in its presentation? Was the point of the film true of high schools in general?

Although only the basic structure of the paragraph was considered (the instructors attempted to show that the structure of an essay was also an expansion of the structure of a paragraph) and thus only a few transparencies were used, some twenty short films were viewed for discussion and writing experiences. Since one viewing in class was not sufficient for most students, students who wished additional viewings could see the films again after class.

Films shown were "A" (McGraw-Hill Films), Blind Gary Davis (McGraw-Hill Films), A Chairy Tale (International Film Bureau), Clay (McGraw-Hill Films), Dream of Wild Horses (McGraw-Hill Films), Embryo (Pyramid Films), Leaf (Pyramid Films), The Moods of Surfing (Pyramid Films), Neighbors (International Film Bureau), Night and Fog (McGraw-Hill Films), No Reason to Stay (Britannica Films), Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge (McGraw-Hill Films), Overture/Nyitany (McGraw-Hill Films), Pigs! (Churchill Films), Rainshower (Churchill Films), Rhinoceros (McGraw-Hill Films), Sailing (Contemporary Films), Sky Capers (Pyramid Films), Timepiece (McGraw-Hill Films), and Wonderful World of Wheels (Pyramid Films). These films resulted in fifteen pieces of writing--journal entries, paragraphs, or essays.

Besides the films and transparencies, another visual approach was introduced in the fourth week, that of writing from a "picture-essay" book, David A. Sohn's Stop, Look, and Write (Bantam Books, N.Y., N.Y., 1968). Besides the pictures, which are arranged in twenty sections, this book contains such rhetorical problems as "The Art of Comparison" and "Contrast." Here again the students discussed the materials in a group and later wrote from the lesson. Then in small groups they attempted to review one another's composition according to the rhetorical principles stressed in the unit or from their previous experiences with the transparencies. Again there followed the group's choosing and reading its best paper before the class, the instructor's reading the compositions privately, and the conference. Because of lack of time, only about one-half of Stop, Look, and Write was covered, but materials studied formed the basis for 10 essays.

To encourage reading, the instructors followed the plan developed by Dr. Daniel N. Fader described in Hooked on Books. In his program of teaching reading and writing to hard-core delinquent boys at Maxey Boys' Training School in Michigan, he provided a room filled with paperbacks from which the boys chose their own books, with magazines that had an immediate appeal (such as those on cars, on sports, on dress, etc.), and with newspapers--local, state, and national. Contrary to the policy of most libraries, the materials could be checked out. Dr. Fader also had the boys keep a journal that was ungraded or unread if the student so specified.

Such a room, filled with paperbacks, magazines, and newspapers, was provided for in the experiement. For 59 students, 400 paperbacks were bought. Of these, each student was asked to read at least two, the number assigned in the conventional writing course. This room was used on alternate days by Groups A and B, and was open each afternoon from two until five o'clock. Eight free reading periods were scheduled throughout the quarter. Their reading selections, which later formed the basis for four pieces of writing, were discussed. Various kinds of newspapers were taken: three daily newspapers--the Birmingham (Alabama) Post-Herald, the Montgomery (Alabama) Advertiser, the Tuscaloosa (Alabama) News, and the Meridian (Mississippi) Star--six weekly newspapers that served the students' home counties, and Sunday editions of two national papers--the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times.

The classroom was open at hours other than the class period. Two research aides conducted activities after class. One was an English major and the other a student who operated the film projector. The instructor was also available when students requested help or when the aides felt he was needed.

During the quarter the student produced 30 pieces of writing--short paragraphs for class reading, reactions to a film or a picture for his journal, or essays. Using criteria for marking freshman papers established by the Department of English at Livingston University, the instructor assigned grades to 12 compositions, the number of compositions required in other composition courses.

The third part of the study was scheduled during the last week. Here, all forms of the previous tests were repeated.

The results of the pre-tests and post-tests were studied to test the investigation. The criteria were:

1. Effective sentence structure

2. Organization of materials

3. Social acceptability of usage

4. Use of conventional punctuation

5. Performance on a standardized writing test

6. Performance on a standardized reading test

7. Attitudes toward the course in freshman composition

Data, both standardized and non-standardized, to be gathered for each test were:

1. Effectiveness of sentence structure was determined by the reaction of three faculty members of the English Department who read the final set of compositions and by the STEP Writing Test.

2. Organization of materials was likewise measured by these three professors and by the STEP Writing Test.

3. Social acceptability of usage was also determined by the three professors and by the STEP Writing Test.

4. Ability to punctuate was likewise measured by three professors and by the STEP Writing Test.

5. A measure of reading akills was measured by the STEP Reading Test.

6. Attitudes toward the course in written composition were measured by A Scale to Measure Attitudes Toward Any School Subject.

Administering the objective tests needs no explanation, but administering the principal non-standard measure used in this investigation--a subjective evaluation of themes--does. The first and last compositions of the quarter were read by three experienced teachers of freshman composition, other than by the teachers of the experimental and the control groups. Students' names were masked. Each pupil was given a letter grade of F (failure), D (below average), C (average), B (good), and A (excellent) by each teacher; and a composite grade was then assigned. Items evaluated were originality of ideas, organization, style, diction, usage, and spelling. Unobtrusive measures, such as the number of absences, were also used.

III. Results

Since the experimental (A and B) groups could not be fully matched with the control (C) group, this project does not lend itself to strict experimental treatment. Therefore the three groups are described in quantitative terms and are compared, but the results are not subjected to sophisticated statistical treatment. For example, an examination of scores obtained before the experiment reveals the following: A-B and C groups were similar on their ACT English scores (See Table I). On the ACT composite scores, C group had a wider spread of scores with a slightly lower median than the A-B groups.

Table I

STANDARD SCORES ON THE AMERICAN COLLEGE TESTS GIVEN IN GRADE 12

	ENGLISH				COMPOSITE		
Groups	A	B	C	Groups	A	B	C
Q3	17	17	18	Q3	18	19	19
Md.	14	16	15	Md.	15	17	15
Q1	10	12	11	Q1	14	16	14
N	15	15	13	N	15	15	13

On the Step Writing Test the combined experimental groups had lower median and quartiles of several points than did the control group. The control group was somewhat weaker on the STEP Reading Test.

Table II

PRE-TEST SCORES ON STEP READING AND WRITING TESTS

	WRITING			READING	
	Experimental	Control		Experimental	Control
Q3	291	294	Q3	302	303
Md.	285	288	Md.	296	293
Q1	280	284	Q1	291	289
N	33	18	N	33	18

Hypothesis 1. Students who use experimental materials will show more gain on a STEP Writing Test than will a control group.

Section A of Table III shows that the whole class of 53 students made significant gain in their writing ability from the beginning to the end of the term. It is somewhat more difficult to demonstrate that the experimental groups improved more than did the control group. The differences are not significant, but they are evident.

If pre-and post-test scores are compared, one notes that the experimental groups began somewhat lower than did the control group and that they progressed to about the same point (Table III B). The superior students of A and B groups, represented by Q3, gained more than did the upper quarter of the students in the C group. The experienced professor of Section A catered to individual differences, producing a comparatively large change in the writing scores of the lowest and highest quarter of his students.

Section C of Table III shows the change in achievement according to national percentiles. For example, at the beginning of the term 3 per cent of the experimental classes rated among the upper third of students nationally; at the end of the term 15 per cent rated there. The control group did not show as great improvement, in that 6 per cent rated at or above the 67 percentile in May. The experimental method helped more students to raise their performance on national percentile rankings than did the control method.

Table III

Pre-and Post-Test Scores on STEP Writing Test

A. PRE -AND POST-TEST SCORES FOR TOTAL CLASS

	Mean	S.D.	N.
March	286	9.9	59
May	292	10.6	53

t= 3.0 .0003 level of confidence

B. PRE -AND POST-TEST SCORES FOR THREE GROUPS

	GROUP A			GROUP B			GROUP C		
	Pre-t.	Post-t.		Pre-t.	Post-t.		Pre-t.	Post-t.	
Q3	289	299	+10	293	302	+9	294	299	+5
Md.	284	292	8	287	295	8	289	295	7
Q1	278	284	6	281	283	2	284	285	3
N	18			15			18		

C. CHANGE IN CUMULATIVE PER CENT AT CRUCIAL POINTS OF NATIONAL PERCENTILE FOR GRADE 13

	Experimental		Control	
National Percentile	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Above 67	3	15	6	12
Above 50	3	20	6	22
Above 33	33	64	39	60
Above 9	90	94	94	94
N	33		18	

Hypothesis 2. Students who use experimental materials will show more gain on a STEP Reading Test than will a control group.

Neither the students who read widely from paperbacks nor the students who read regular college material gained in their reading ability. Furthermore, no more change was shown by superior than by inferior readers, as is revealed in Table III.

Table IV

PPE-AND POST-TEST SCORES ON STEP READING TEST

	GROUP A		GROUP B		GROUP C	
	Pre-t.	Post-t.	Pre-t.	Post-t.	Pre-t.	Post-t.
Q3	304	303	299	301	303	299
Md.	296	293	294	295	293	296
Q1	292	289	289	289	289	287
N	18		15		18	

Hypothesis 3. Students who use the experimental materials will show as much improvement in writing when taught by an inexperienced teacher as by an experienced teacher.

Group B (taught by an inexperienced teacher) was somewhat higher on ACT scores and on the writing pre-test than was Group A (taught by an experienced teacher, Table III B). Both groups

made the same median improvement in writing, but the higher quarter of students under the experienced teacher made somewhat more gain between pre-and post-test.

Hypothesis 4. Students who use experimental materials will show more improvement in theme writing, as evaluated by a panel of judges, than will a control group.

The students of the A and B groups had written consistently failing themes in previous quarters. On their first attempt, two-thirds of Group A and three-fourths of Group B received an F grade, in contrast to only 14 per cent of Group C. At the end of the quarter, the panel of judges rated three-fourths of the themes of Groups A and B above a grade of F. Table V shows that the A and B groups raised their grades appreciably, in proportion, while the C group made less improvement.

Table V

TEACHER GRADES ON THEMES AT BEGINNING AND END OF TERM

Group A

First Theme		Last Theme	Difference	
5 A	0	0	0	A
4 B	0	0	0	B
3 C	0	35%	+35%	C
2 D	35%	43%	+8	D
1 F	65%	22%	-43	F

Group B

First Theme		Last Theme	Difference	
5 A	0	0	0	A
4 B	0	6%	+6	B
3 C	6%	25%	+19	C
2 D	19%	44%	+25	D
1 F	75%	25%	-50	F

Group C

First	Theme	Last	Theme	Difference	
5	A	0	0	0	A
4	B	5%	5%	0	B
3	C	29%	57%	+28	C
2	D	52%	14%	-38	D
1	F	14%	24%	+10	F

Hypothesis 5. Students who use the experimental materials will improve in attitude toward English more than will students using conventional materials.

The Remmers Attitude Scale enables one to determine which of any four subjects is liked best and which one is liked least. Table VI A shows that the attitude toward English as a favored subject rose considerably during the course for the A and B groups, but that it dropped slightly for the control group. The control group disliked the course least at the beginning and also at the end of the course. Students in A and B groups who had ranked English as disliked on the pre-test disliked it less on the post-test.

When the shift in attitude on individual test items of the Remmers Scale was investigated, comparatively little change was noted toward the three other subjects. Groups A and B shifted toward more favorable feelings about English, but there was a slight negative shift on the part of the C group.

Table VI

Change of Attitude Toward English
Shown by Remmers Attitude Scale

A. ATTITUDE TOWARD SUBJECTS

Favored Subject

Group A		Group B		Group C	
Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
History (HY)	EH	MH	EH	HY	SC
Science (SC)	HY	HY	SC	EH	HY
Math (MH)	SC	EH	MH	SC	EH
English (EH)	MH	SC	HY	MH	MH

Disliked Subject

Group A		Group B		Group C	
Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
MH	HY	EH	MH	MH	HY
EH	MH	MH	EH	HY	MH
SC	EH	HY	HY	SC	SC
HY	SC	SC	SC	EH	EH

B. NUMBER OF CHANGES TOWARD LIKING OR DISLIKING, MEASURED BY 17 ITEMS

Subject		Group A	Group B	Group C
English	Favorable	6	3	2
	Unfavorable	*	1	3
Math	Favorable	1	-	2
	Unfavorable	-	2	1
History	Favorable	1	1	2
	Unfavorable	1	2	2
Science	Favorable	1	3	4
	Unfavorable	-	-	1

Certain unobtrusive data revealed the effect of the experimental program. After films had been shown in class many students again viewed films voluntarily. Thirty-three students asked for 54 post viewings. The statistics do not show how many films were seen, but some students saw films as many as six times before writing.

Students in the experimental class also read more. Whereas the students in the regular freshman composition class read two assigned books, those in the experimental groups read more widely. Paperbacks were displayed in racks, and magazines and newspapers were available. Eight periods of free reading were given during the quarter. The number of books read was 186, or an average of 4.6 per student. No figures could be assigned to the use of magazines and newspapers. Neither instructors nor student helpers saw students reading the Los Angeles Times or the New York Times; the most popular newspapers were the Meridian Star and the Tuscaloosa News, the ones that carried news of the students' communities. Two or more issues of 20 magazines were used. A student poll showed that magazines most frequently read were the sports, picture, and women's magazines.

The last unobtrusive datum was the number of voluntary absences. In the experimental group these averaged 8.97 per student, as compared with 15.3 in a class of repeating students scheduled the quarter before. However, absences in the experimental group were higher than in the control group, which had an average of 7.05 per student.

IV. Conclusions

Students who were below average on the English section of the American College Tests were placed in an experimental group; they were presented a wealth of visual materials and paperbacks in an informal class situation for the purpose of increasing their writing ability. They were compared with a control group of approximately similar low writing ability; this group was taught by traditional methods. The problem was to determine whether the experimental materials made an appreciable improvement in ability to read and write. Several hypotheses were tested. The following conclusions were drawn:

1. An inexperienced teacher had almost equal success in using the visual aids to improve skills as did an experienced teacher.

2. Reading skill was not improved by non-focused increased experience in reading.

3. Concentration on writing improvement brought improvement, whether traditional or experimental materials were used. The experimental materials did raise the level somewhat more of students in the experimental groups than did conventional materials in the control group. The improvement in writing was demonstrated both on a standardized test and on themes judgedby a panel of teachers.

4. The experimental materials brought an enthusiastic change in attitudes, a change not evident in the control group.

Many previously failing students were helped to learn to write and to like to write and read. It is believed that, had they been matched with a group of students with similar experiences, the results would have unequivocably favored the use of visual aids and paperbacks.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this investigator does not believe that the results of this experiment statistically prove this method to be superior to other methods for all students, he does believe that the results justify continued experimentation with this method for students of different abilities and different socio-economic backgrounds. The implications should be of particular interest to colleges or universities that have liberal admission policies.